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A schematic diagram of a laser probe assembly 10. The assembly is housed in a rounded rectangular enclosure. At the top is a rectangular block labeled "POWER SUPPLY" 26. Below it, a "LASER SOURCE" 14 is tilted at an angle. A beam of light, represented by two parallel lines 16, originates from the laser source and passes through a lens 18 and a small aperture 19. The beam is directed towards a target surface 30. A vacuum chamber 24 is connected to the side of the enclosure, with a dashed line indicating a vacuum path. A power cord 22 is shown entering the enclosure from the bottom. The entire assembly is labeled 10.

Hair cutting apparatus including a housing (10) and laser apparatus (12) disposed in the housing (10) and arranged to provide a beam of light (18) impinging on hair (19) to be cut, the beam of light (18) being operative to cut the hair (19).

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HAIR CUTTING APPARATUS

The present invention relates to hair cutting apparatus generally.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

There exists a great variety of hair cutting apparatus. These include single or multiple blade razors which are pulled across the surface of the skin and devices having an electrically powered vibratory element which drives opposing blades in a scissors type action.

U.S. Patent 3,934,115 describes a method and apparatus for electric singe cutting in which heated and opposed edges of two thin strips of metal form a slot, at which hair extending therethrough is singed to effect severance of the hair.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention seeks to provide improved hair cutting apparatus.

There is thus provided in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention hair cutting apparatus including a housing and laser apparatus disposed in the housing and arranged to provide a beam of light impinging on hair to be cut, the beam of light being operative to cut the hair.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the laser apparatus is operative to provide a beam of light at a wavelength which is strongly absorbed by hair to be cut but not strongly absorbed by adjacent tissue.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the wavelength of the beam is such that it is generally not absorbed by human skin.

A preferred wavelength range for operation of the shaving apparatus is 0.8 micron.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention the operational wavelength of the laser apparatus is selected to be such that only hairs of a certain color, such as white or gray hairs, are cut and the remainder of the hairs are not cut. A wavelength of 0.8 micron is suitable for this purpose. Such apparatus may be particularly useful for removing unwanted white or gray hairs automatically.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the laser apparatus also comprises optical transfer means for directing the beam to the hair. The optical transfer means may include refraction and reflection means having

optical power.

Additionally in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, hair collection apparatus may also be provided in the housing for collecting loose hairs that have been cut by the laser beam. The hair collection apparatus may comprise a vacuum device or alternatively or additionally, electrostatic hair collection apparatus.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention will be understood and appreciated more fully from the following detailed description, taken in conjunction with the drawings in which:

Fig. 1A is a pictorial illustration of the use of a shaver constructed and operative in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 1B is a pictorial illustration of the use of a laser hair cutter constructed and operative in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 2A is a simplified sectional illustration of a laser shaver constructed and operative in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 2B is a simplified sectional illustration taken along the lines 2B - 2B of Fig. 2A;

Fig. 3A is a simplified sectional illustration of a laser shaver constructed and operative in accordance with another preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 3B is a simplified sectional illustration taken along the lines 3B - 3B of Fig. 3A; and

Fig. 4 is a simplified sectional illustration of a laser hair cutter constructed and operative in accordance with another preferred embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF A PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Reference is now made to Figs. 1A, 2A and 2B which illustrate a laser shaver constructed and operative in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention. The laser shaver preferably comprises a housing 10, typically formed of plastic or of any other suitable material. Disposed within housing 10 is laser apparatus 12, preferably comprising a laser source 14 and laser beam transfer optics 16, which direct a laser beam 18, produced by the laser source 14 to hairs 19 to be cut.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the laser source 14 comprises a semiconductor laser such as a Gallium Arsenide laser, preferably operative to provide an output laser beam at a wavelength which is strongly absorbed by hair, such as facial hair but which is not strongly absorbed by surrounding tissue, such as skin. A preferred wavelength is 0.8 micron, although it is assumed that other wavelengths may also be suitable.

It is a particular feature of the present invention that suitable selection of the operative wavelength of the laser source 14 enables hair to be vaporized and carbonized at the location of impingement of the laser beam 18 thereon, thus separating that portion of the hair still attached to the hair follicle from that extending outward from the impingement location, thereby producing a hair cutting effect.

It is also a particular feature of the present invention that by suitable selection of the operative wavelength of the laser source only hair of a selectable color or range of colors may be cut, while hairs of other colors are left

intact. In such a way white or gray hair may be automatically removed by a simple combing action.

The laser beam transfer optics 16 preferably comprise reflective optics, such as a mirror 20 and refractive optics such as a lens 22. Any other suitable arrangement of laser beam transfer optics 16, including any suitable optical element or elements may alternatively be employed.

In accordance with one preferred embodiment of the present invention, there is also provided a laser beam absorber 30 for absorbing the laser beam and thus preventing spurious impingements thereof.

Reference is now made to Figs. 3A and 3B which illustrate a preferred embodiment of laser shaver in which the laser beam transfer optics is designed to provide multiple reflections of the laser beam over a shaving region. In this case, the absorber 30 is replaced by at least two mirrors 32 and preferably a generally rectangular circumferential mirror assembly which is operative to provide a back and forth pattern of laser beams, which can be effective for cutting hair over a relatively large area. It is appreciated that in this embodiment, initial impingement of the laser beam on mirror 20 is such as to produce a reflection which is not perpendicular to the planes of mirrors 32.

According to a preferred embodiment of the present invention, there is provided apparatus for collecting loose hairs, which are cut by the impingement thereon of laser beam 18. The apparatus for collecting loose hairs preferably comprises

electrically operated vacuum apparatus 24, such as a suction blower but may alternatively comprise any other suitable hair collection apparatus, such as electrostatic apparatus.

Both the laser source 12 and the vacuum apparatus may receive electrical power from a suitable power supply 26, which may be battery powered or alternatively powered by an external source of current.

Reference is now made to Fig. 4, which illustrates hair cutting apparatus constructed and operative in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention and comprising many of the same elements as in the embodiment of Figs. 2A, 2B, 3A and 3B, which are indicated by identical reference numerals. In the embodiment of Fig. 4, there is provided a comb portion 40 which arranges the hairs 42 on a person's head, generally in a plane so that they can be impinged upon by a laser beam 18, which may be focussed thereon by a lens 22. Alternatively lens 22 may be eliminated. As a further alternative additional optical apparatus may be provided for positioning or configuring the laser beam, directing it along multiple paths or effecting scanning thereof.

It is a particular feature of the embodiment of Fig. 4, that color specific cutting may be provided, thus enabling white or gray hairs to be automatically cut, while leaving uncut dark colored hair. Additionally or alternatively, a hair thinning function may be provided, whereby only a desired percentage of all hairs may be cut by the laser beam.

It will be appreciated by persons skilled in the art that the present invention is not limited to what has been particularly shown and described hereinabove. Rather the scope of the present invention is defined only by the claims which follow:

C L A I M S

1. Hair cutting apparatus comprising a housing and laser means disposed in the housing and arranged to provide a beam of light impinging on hair to be cut, the beam of light being operative to cut the hair.
2. Hair cutting apparatus according to claim 1 and wherein said laser means is operative to provide a beam of light at a wavelength which is strongly absorbed by hair to be cut but not strongly absorbed by adjacent tissue.
3. Hair cutting apparatus according to claim 2 and wherein said wavelength of the beam is such that it is generally not absorbed by human skin.
4. Hair cutting apparatus according to any of the preceding claims and wherein said wavelength of the beam is such that it is generally absorbed by hair in a predetermined color range but is not generally absorbed by hair outside of said color range.
5. Hair cutting apparatus according to claim 4 and wherein said wavelength is such that it is generally absorbed by white and gray hair, producing cutting thereof but is not generally absorbed by hair of other colors.
6. Hair cutting apparatus according to any of claims 2 - 5 and wherein said wavelength is 0.8 micron.

7. Hair cutting apparatus according to any of claims 1 - 6 and wherein said laser means also comprises optical transfer means for directing the beam to the hair.

8. Hair cutting apparatus according to claim 7 and wherein said optical transfer means includes refraction and reflection means having optical power.

9. Hair cutting apparatus according to any of the preceding claims and also comprising hair collection means in the housing for collecting loose hairs that have been cut by the laser beam.

10. Hair cutting apparatus according to claim 9 and wherein said hair collection means comprises a vacuum device.

11. Hair cutting apparatus according to any of claims 7 - 10 and wherein said optical transfer means comprise means for producing multiple reflections of said laser beam.

12. Hair cutting apparatus according to any of claims 7 - 11 and wherein said optical transfer means comprise means for focusing said laser beam.

13. A method for color selectively cutting hair comprising the steps of:

providing a laser beam having a wavelength which is strongly absorbed by hair of a predetermined color range, which

hair it is sought to cut and which is not strongly absorbed by hair of a color outside of the predetermined color range, which it which is sought not to cut; and

causing the laser beam to impinge on hair for cutting those hairs of said predetermined color range while not cutting those hairs of a color outside of the predetermined color range.

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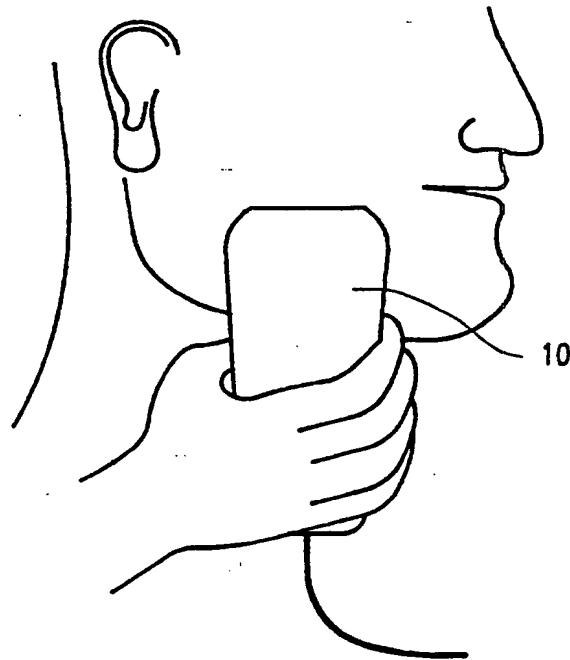


FIG. 1A

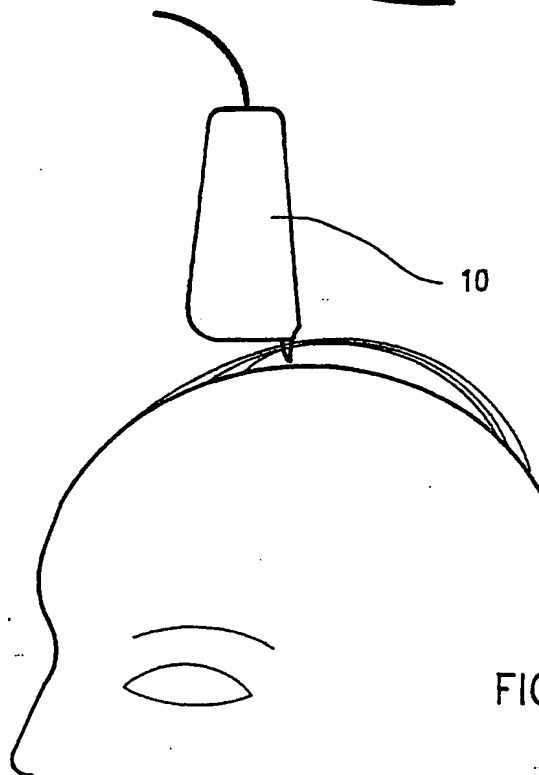


FIG. 1B

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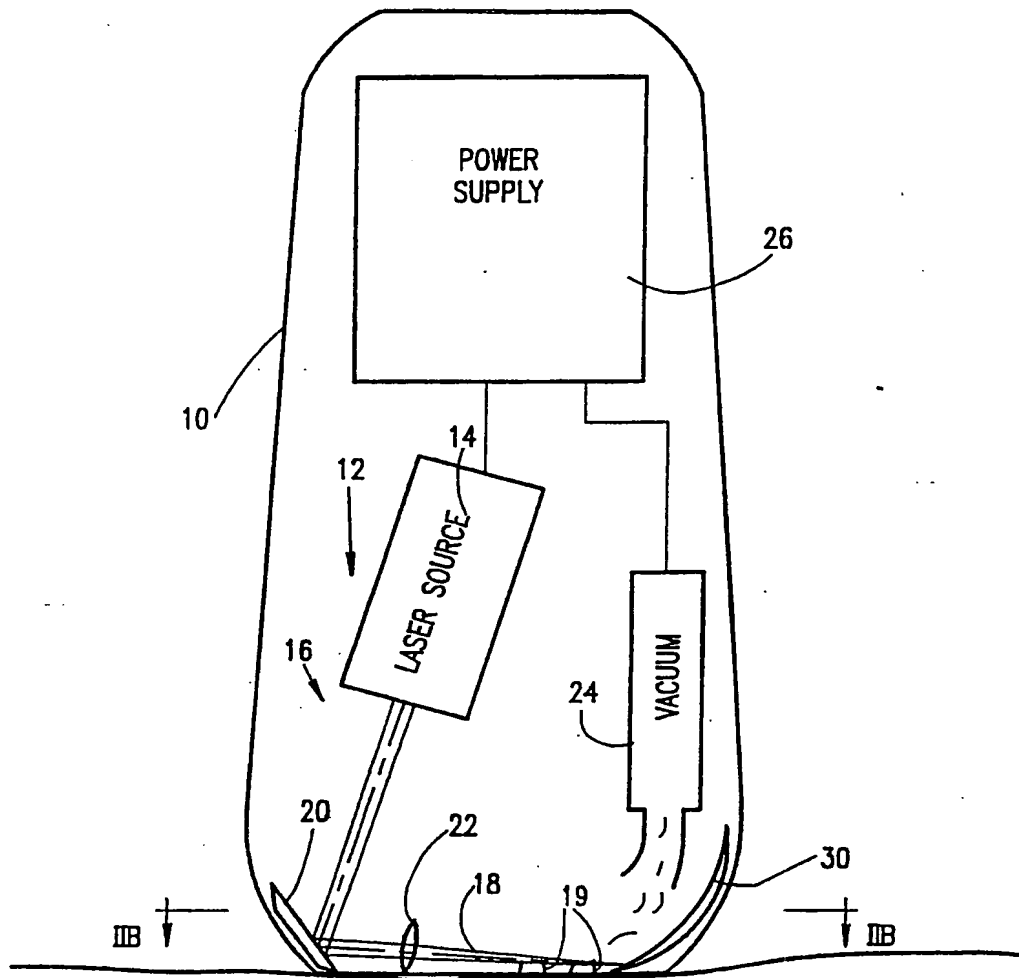
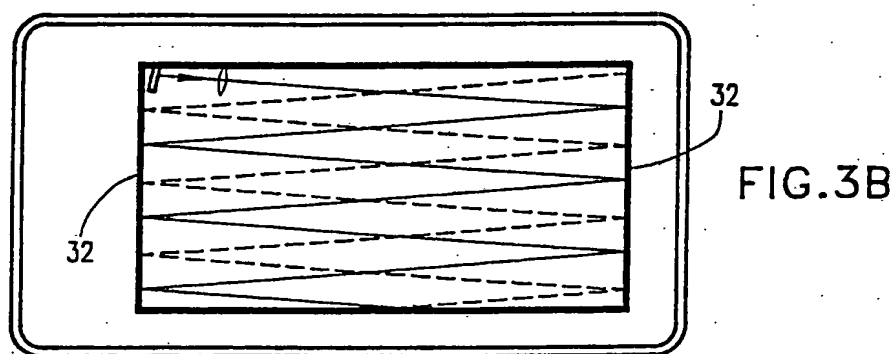
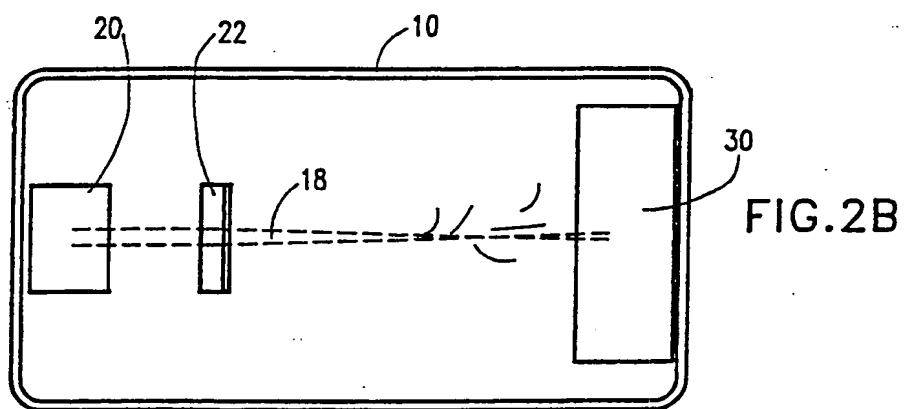


FIG.2A

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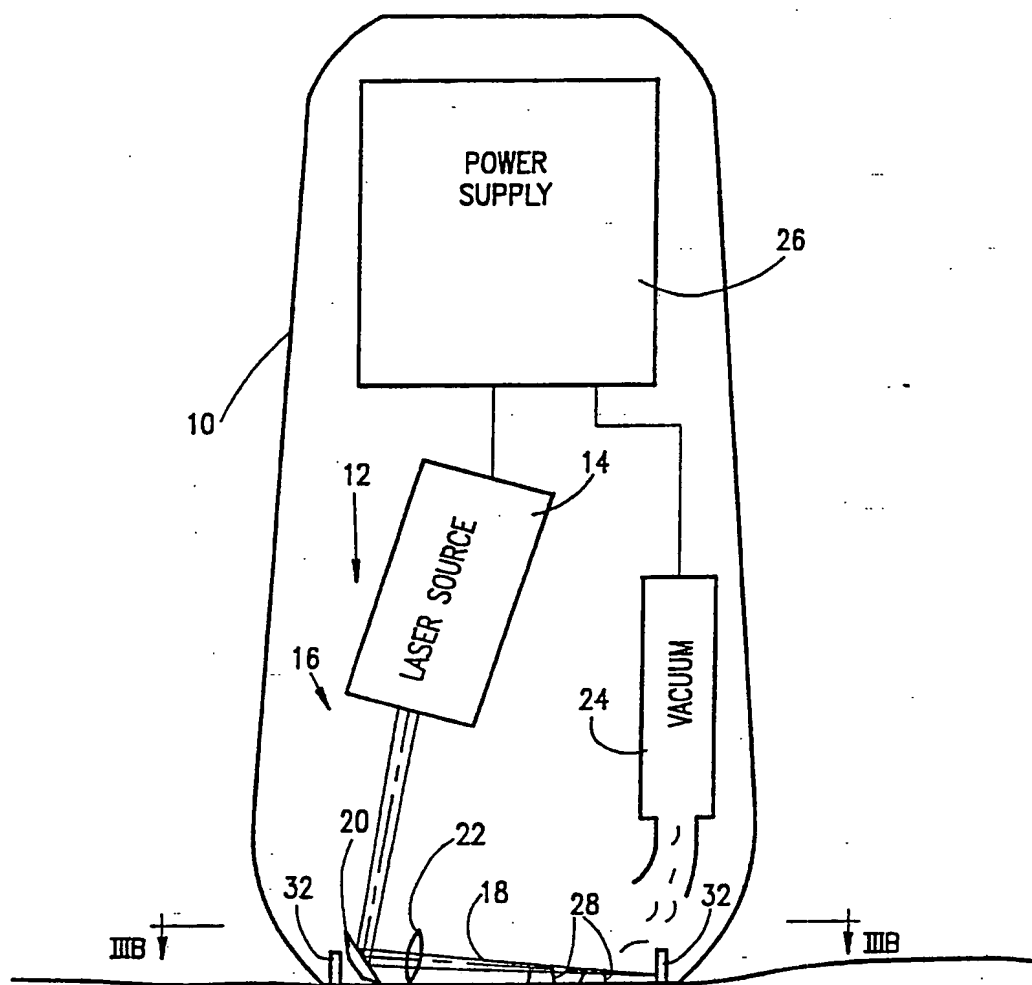
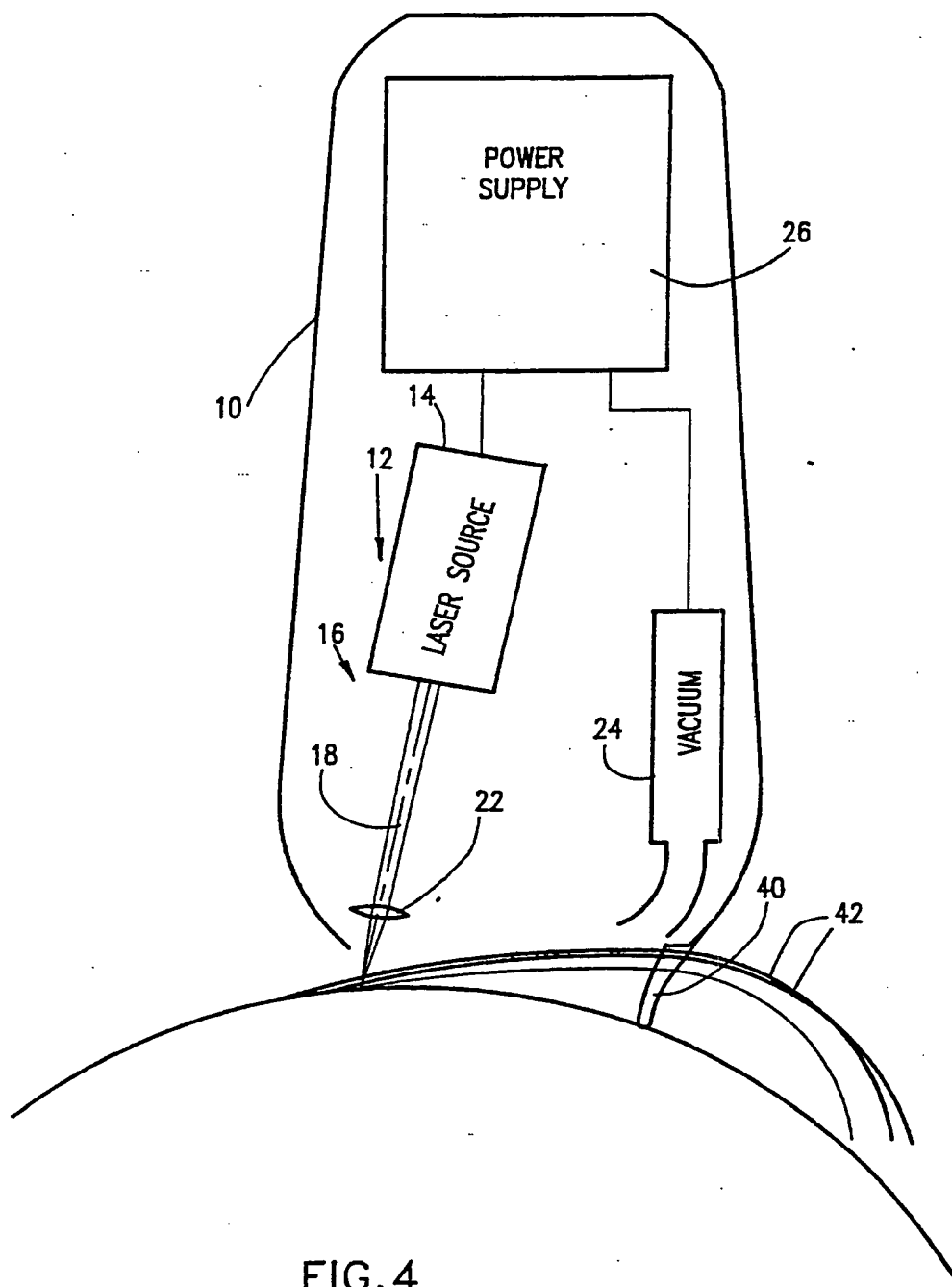


FIG.3A

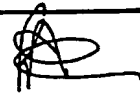
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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

PCT/GB 92/00426

International Application No

I. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER (If several classification symbols apply, indicate all) ⁶		
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both National Classification and IPC		
Int.Cl. 5 B26B19/00; B26B21/00; B23K26/00		
II. FIELDS SEARCHED		
Minimum Documentation Searched ⁷		
Classification System	Classification Symbols	
Int.Cl. 5	B26B ; B23K ; A61B	
Documentation Searched other than Minimum Documentation to the extent that such Documents are included in the Fields Searched ⁸		
III. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT⁹		
Category ⁹	Citation of Document, ¹¹ with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages ¹²	Relevant to Claim No. ¹³
P,X	WO,A,9 106 406 (SIMON) 16 May 1991	1-5,7,8, 12
P,Y	see page 3, line 36 - page 5; claims; figures	9,10
Y	--- US,A,4 578 558 (J. E. CLEGG) 25 March 1986 see figures 1-5,14 see column 1, line 39 - column 2, line 63 see column 4, line 30 - line 53	9,10
A	--- US,A,4 051 760 (M. GLENNAN) 4 October 1977 see figure 1 see column 2, line 30 - column 3, line 2	1,7,8,12
X	--- -/-	1
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IV. CERTIFICATION		
Date of the Actual Completion of the International Search	Date of Mailing of this International Search Report	
10 JUNE 1992	30.06.92	
International Searching Authority	Signature of Authorized Officer	
EUROPEAN PATENT OFFICE	RAVEN P. 	

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Category *	Citation of Document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to Claim No.
A	<p>US,A,4 819 669 (E. POLITZER) 11 April 1989 see column 1, line 48 - column 2, line 41; figures 1,5 see column 3, line 34 - column 4, line 32 see column 5, line 24 - column 6</p> <p>---</p> <p></p>	1,7,11

**ANNEX TO THE INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT
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Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
WO-A-9106406	16-05-91	DE-A- 3936367 EP-A- 0452459	08-05-91 23-10-91
US-A-4578558	25-03-86	None	
US-A-4051760	04-10-77	AU-A- 8246575 AU-A- 8246475	06-01-77 06-01-77
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